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Dartmouth Fire Started by Illegal Storage of Gasoline

State Fire Stephen D. Coan and Dartmouth Fire District 3 Chief Richard K. Arruda said the June 4, 2008 fire at Wedgewood Commons was started by the ignition of gasoline that was being illegally stored in the apartment.

The occupant was storing gasoline in water jugs, the type used in office water bubblers, in his closet. Investigators believe the unintentional fire started when the gasoline vapors were ignited by either the natural gas water heater or a propane-fueled cooking appliance being used at the time of the fire.

Coan said, "All of us have felt pinch of skyrocketing gasoline prices but hording gasoline and storing it in the home is not a solution. Gasoline should never be stored inside the home as there are so many possible ignition sources. Gasoline vapors will travel and find a heat source. The risk of fire, explosion or environmental pollution from storing gasoline in this very dangerous way was extremely high."

Chief Arruda said, "It is absolutely amazing that there were no serious injuries from this fire. This is a case where the sprinkler system gave the buildings occupants the time needed to escape and controlled the fire until we arrived, confining the damage to the apartment where the fire started."

The fire is being jointly investigated by the Dartmouth Fire District #3, state police and code compliance officers assigned to the Office of the State Fire Marshal.

State law (MGL c 148, s23) states that a maximum of one quart of gasoline may be stored in any part of any building used for human habitation, which includes attached garages. Up to one gallon may be stored in a shed or detached garage if it is 50 feet away from the home. All gasoline must be stored in approved containers. It is illegal to dispense gasoline into anything but a vehicle or an approved container. Water jugs are not approved containers. The code compliance investigation is continuing.

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